In THOMPSON'S WOODS Forrest Crissey

THE BLVE SKY PRESS

IN THOMPSON'S WOODS



WONDER if in Thompson's woods
The violets push their modest hoods
Through bedded leaves
which frosts and suns
Have wasted to frail skeletons-

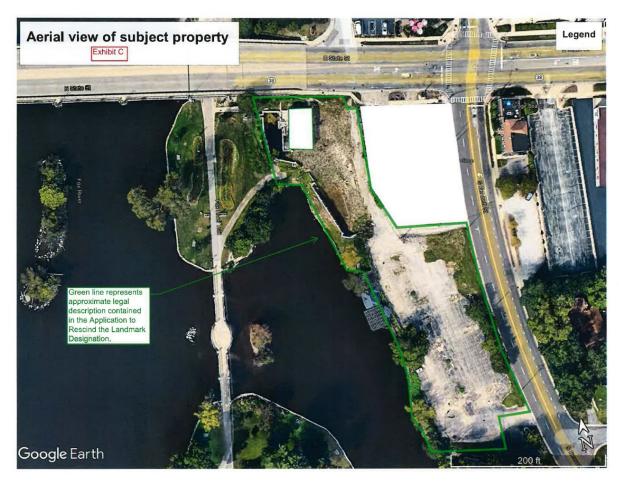
Networks of silver veins to strain Sunlight and shadow, dew and rain, Into a nectar that shall thrill Hearts of new violets, and fill, With odors of the budding wood, Each heart within each blushing hood.

I wonder if in Thompson's wood
The partridge rears her speckled brood,
And scuds away beneath the brush
When alien footsteps break the hush
That hangs above her mossy nest
And dwells within her mottled breast.
I wonder if the springtitne brings
The whirr of countless pigeons' wings,
The thousand springtime signs and
sounds

With which my memory abounds.

I wonder if the summer's night
Is threaded by the wheeling flight
Of mad-cap whip-poor-will, whose cry,
Like wail of ghost, goes shud'ring by.
I wonder if the beeches wave
As soft a shimmer o'er your grave,
Sweet girl, as when the hunter's moon
Turned midnight into brightest noon,
And first I kissed you as we stood,—
That night of nights!—in Thompson's
Wood.

The Mill Race Inn (more accurately in a miller's parlance "The Tail Race Inn") is top of mind again with the recent application to "de-landmark" the site. The historiography of the MRI site is complex. The "landmarking" was a recent event, but it was quintessential Geneva political theatre. The developer/landowner was the victim of a landmarking ambush perpetrated in the waning moments of a puerile \$300,000 process known as a "Charrette." Émile Zola depicted such a scene of feverish activity, a *nuit de charrette* or "charrette night." Zola, of course, twice



The small white box in the upper left corner of the green polygon is the rubblestone building. Just west of this is the foundation of the "step down" expansion of the main dining room. In the basement below this was the Mill Grill that opened in 1981.

crammed all night for final exams that would have secured his undergraduate degree. He flunked both times. Geneva's Charrette completed this trifecta of fiascos.

The current de-landmarking foofaraw is a sequel to the prior chariot smashup that doomed the proposal for about 125 apartments on less than 2 acres at the SW corner of State Street and Bennett Street (Route 38 and Route 25.)

Now the jilted developer/landowner, Shodeen, wants to sever the old rubblestone blacksmith shop/carriage factory structure from the rest of the land parcel. Thus, the question becomes Is Thompson's Woods hallowed ground?

My recollections of the MRI date to 1954-55 when as a lad of 8 or 9 I occasionally was invited to join my father and his friend Reverend Robert B. Stewart of the First Presbyterian Church in Wheaton for lunch. They always met at the MRI and did so several times a year (but never in the winter). Rev. Stewart was the pastor of Colonel Robert R McCormick. I would occasionally ride along with my father when he made house calls over at Cantigny. I usually stayed in the car but on one occasion when it was very cold, I was permitted to sit inside near the foyer. The Col. had several doctors but my father was nearest. I suspect Rev. Stewart was the one who suggested my father to the Col.

Rev. Steward came from a large clan of Presbyterian Ministers (his three brothers, his father and grandfather, and a couple of uncles). They all went to Princeton and most had doctorates. I suspect my father, who was raised as a Presbyterian, first met Rev Stewart when we lived in Winfield quite close to Cantigny. Stewart also tended to a small flock of mixed Protestants in Wayne for several years in the late 40's and early 50's while his main job was in Wheaton. He may have been the influence that caused my father to move us to Army Trail in Dunham Woods near the Dunham Castle. My father bought some property in Northern Minnesota in the late 50's after Rev. Stewart had "scouted it out." The Col. died in 1955, and Rev. Stewart died in 1960 at Delnor Hospital in St. Charles. He had last visited us in Minnesota a few months before his death. The Colonel gave Stewart and my father a pair of huge couches from Cantigny. My father's half of the largess still occupies the lodge room in Minnesota.

When I got out of the Air Force in 1976 I lived upstairs in the William Conant House at Hamilton and Second where my father had moved his office from the upstairs at the NW corner of State and Third. I commuted to Chicago for a few years to the West Side Medical Center and to MacNeal Hospital, then came to practice full time in Geneva in 1981 and bought the little stone McKinley House on River Lane. I had been to the MRI only a few times between 1964 when I went to college and 1980.

This windy preamble brings us to my 1981 favorite Geneva dining venue the "subterranean MRI" known as the Mill Grill. In the early 80's the MRI was three restaurants: The "County Inn dining room," the Mill Grill, and the Gazebo. I am not in the least bit surprised that the Mill Grill was never sanctioned by the City.

Rather, the Mill Grill's "Zoning Variance" was "a wink and a nod" in 1981 (very similar to the winking-nod "special use for Malone's Funeral Home in 2001"). The illegal speakeasy vibe of the underground Mill Grill was authentic. Oh yah, there was discussion of the variance but it was never enacted. Who was the mayor who granted the illegal liquor license? Get the details here: MRI-Historical-Development---UPDATED---081216 (geneva.il.us)

AFTERNOON WALKS FIRESIDE TALKS They are both part of a day that ends with dinner at the Mill Race Inn. Our quiet setting along the Fox River is the perfect complement to an autumn outing. In the fire-lit Country Inn dining room, you'll find classic American fare beautifully trimmed with a panorama of the river. Or enjoy more casual dining and entertainment in the cozy DAILY SUBURBAN TRIB Fri., Nov. 5, 1982 Mill Grill. Enjoy it as a couple or with a couple of friends. At the restaurant that is a landmark. With food that is legend. Serving daily from 11:30 a.m. Reservations suggested. 312/232-2030 Major credit cards accepted. Route 38 (Roosevelt Road and Route 25 At the bridge on the Fox River, Geneva MILL RACE INN

A Mill Grill patron walked on the often-slippery wooded deck to a doorway toward the sw corner that was not conspicuously marked. You immediately descended the stairs. I recall the wall to the right was rubble stone (but was it faux?). The bar was the first station, and then a very small stage was nearby where live entertainment occurred on Wed, Fri and Sat nights.

There was an open chef manned broiler/carvery and a fireplace. In winter especially it was a terrific place to go - warm, convivial, and even I could walk home.

I knew the MRI chief chef, Richard Grimm, from that era. He did not like being called a chef and identified himself as the "cook." I asked him many years later why the Mill Grill never flooded on his watch. (The Mill Grill was in what now appears to be an abandoned swimming pool.) His answer was "it was simple but hard – the staff and I all sand-bagged all night a few times."

Newspapers

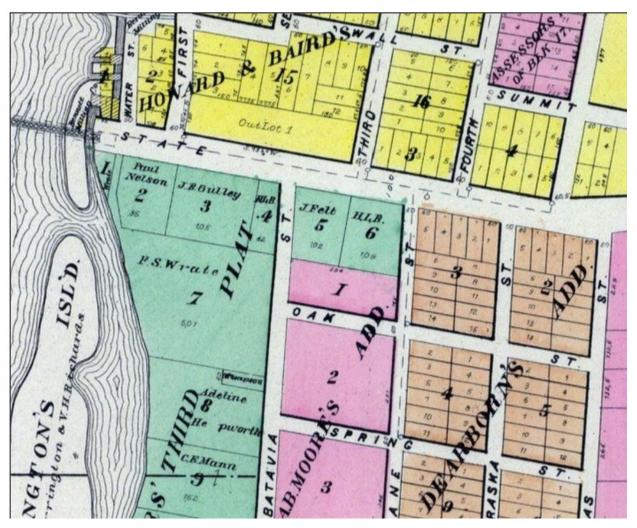
by Mancestry

Chicago Tribune (Chicago, Illinois) · 19 Nov 1982, Fri · Page 92

MILL RACE INN — Pianist-singer Mike Tossing Fridays and Saturdays through the month and Wednesday. Singer Roberta Fox Thursday. Both performers 7:30-11:30 p.m.; no cover. The Mill Grill, Ill. Hwys. 25 and 38, Geneva. 232-2030.

In 2006, I warned Mayor Burns about recruiting to the MRI the "R's" from Horwath's on Harlem Avenue. Horwath's was a notorious Chicago mob watering hole in Elmwood Park. Three groups co-mingled there: wise guys and Cook County Judges wearing their British grey judicial wigs at Horwath's, and FBI agents on the adjacent roofs. "Operation Greylord" first surfaced in March of 1984. Operation Greylord — FBI

I asked the mayor what he thought when the meat locker at MRI was "cleaned out" three times in 2009. In 2011, shortly after the restaurant closed, five large food coolers were stolen. These crimes were never solved, and the MRI was no more by January 21, 2011. The asking sale price dropped from \$2.2mil to \$900,000 by early 2012. The 1.44 acre parcel had been purchased in 2004 for \$1.7mil by Mill Race Inn, LLC (involuntarily dissolved on in May 2012). The next sale was in 2014 when Shodeen purchased the property at auction out of receivership for \$550,000. The taxpayers shelled out \$300,000 for the Charrette fiasco in 2019 and received nothing. The taxpayer beatings will continue until their morale improves, or until leadership occurs at City Hall.



This 1904 Geneva map predates the creation of the segment of Route 25/Bennett Street that connected Spring Street to First (now Bennett). This ROW basically obliterated part "Thompson's Woods" made immortal by both Forrest and Kate Shurtleff Crissey. However, the foot bridges over the creek that Kate described were part of Thompson's Woods. The Thompson place is just a little box on the map, but the creek they bridged ran through the Wrate property at the level of Oak Street just behind the Gully place.

Does not "In Thompson's Woods" give historical significance to the" Thompson Park" of "several acres" on the riverbank as described by Kate Crissey in "The Story of a Boy and a Girl" and by Forrest Crissey? The first appearance of the poem was in Buford's Magazine, Vol. 10, in 1893, the year the Crisseys moved to Chicago from Geneva where they had first lived in "five rooms" of the "new" (1856) part of Dr. Gully's House. Buford got the "Thomson" wrong. When Forrest Crissey's little poetry book "In Thompson's Woods" was printed by the Blue Sky Press in 1901 the "p" is in both the book and poem titles.

The City of Geneva and the Geneva Park District should plan to make Kate Crissey's dream come true by creating the "The Sjodin Historical Park on the Fox River" on those two acres. Early industrial Geneva could be a theme. Move the old Bristol Farmhouse again (a "HABS"

The Gully House

We had found a house, or rather half a house, in the Gully house, half way up the east side hill on the south side of the street, (122 East State street). Five very pleasant good sized rooms, west rooms looking down to the river through a grand old orchard. There was no road at the foot of the hill then, and all along where the new road curved up through the Wrate property (now Jarvis) were magnificent elms, oaks and maples. quite a forest, extending up to what was called the Thompson place! The Thompsons must have had several acres, and it was as beautiful as any park I ever saw. A little brook went slantingly through it. The Thompsons had planted flowers along both sides of this little stream and built a couple of rustic bridges over it. All their land went down to the river and looked out on the Island which then had no bridge to carry one to it. The grass grew high along the banks of the Island, which Bill French, Forrest's secretary, later named "The Children's Isle." In the spring the river sometimes overflowed the center of it-then later it would be a perfect rainbow of wild phlox, Virginia bluebells and later the yellow flowers.

Many here will remember the Pageant of Hiawatha which was put on, using the Island for a stage, and the sloping hilly banks of the Lance pasture for a "dress circle." Of course that was after the Island was redeemed at least partially, and the park bridge was built, I think.

"The Story of a Boy and a Girl" by Kate D. Shurtleff Crissey, Geneva Republican 10 January 1947, p2. structure, for God's sake) to Sjodin Park. That structure was where the first steam fanning mill was produced, and it was a bar during prohibition. What could be more historically interesting? The historical society could move over there. Maybe Mr. Sjodin would donate the land. He built much of Geneva. He rescued Geneva East from bankruptcy and completed it. The Herrington Inn is some of his good work. His legacy is part of Geneva's History.

SOME EARLY CLANS, ABODES, & ROADS – Rod's Ramblings and Ruminations (genevanotes.com)

Julius Alexander owned the land on which the Mill Race Inn was located. The east bank land south of Alexander's was Daniel Haight's and purchased from him by James Herrington. Herrington sold the land to James Strode and Mark Daniels. They divided "timber lots" south of Alexander into 150 foot "tall" lots with alternating parcels owned by Daniels and then Strode, etc. The southern most lot was bought by Samson Chambers, with the north boundary at what was named Chambers Street. How that Street became "Chalmers" only the scrivener who made the error knows.

Today's Genevans should read Kate Crissey's description of the hallowed ground of Thompson's Woods and turn it into a prophecy.